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Plautus and Early Roman Tragedy

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The Plautine *palliata* is conventionally understood to be an adaptation of Hellenistic New Comedy to the very different tastes of a Roman audience. Thanks to a modern tradition of sympathetic Plautine criticism, a tradition which seems to have begun with Friedrich Leo[1] and is especially indebted to Fraenkel's great book on Plautus,[2] scholars now have a much higher regard for the literary merit of the Plautine *palliata* than was once the case.

However there has been no real change in the way Plautus' relationship to his Greek models is viewed. Concepts like "expansion," for example, or "omission," "conflation" (*contaminatio*) and other types of alterations detailed by Fraenkel in his account of Plautine composition, clearly reflect the perspective of the Greek models. The "alterations," after all, are alterations to these Greek models. Plautus himself seems to invite such a perspective in ostensibly programmatic statements like: *Philemo scripsit, Plautus vortit barbare,*[3] "Philemon wrote it, Plautus turned it into foreign fare." It is well known, of course, that *barbarus* and related forms tend to be used ironically by Plautus, so that this verse also could mean "Philemon wrote it, Plautus made it intelligible to you clods," and perhaps "Philemon wrote it, Plautus ruined it." But even when one makes allowance for the fact that the line is as much joke as statement of fact, it still seems to characterize Plautus' compositional method as the act of adapting a Greek model to a new purpose.

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[1] In particular, his *Plautinische Forschungen* (Berlin 1895) and *Geschichte der römischen Literatur,* I (Berlin 1913), pp. 133 ff.

[2] Eduard Fraenkel, *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* (Florence 1960).

[3] *Trin.* 19. I am using the text of W. M. Lindsay, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae,* 2 vols. (Oxford 1904-05).

Such a view of the Plautine method is generally associated with a rather unflattering assessment of the sophistication of the Roman audience. We have just seen that even in Plautus this attitude may have provided one of the ironies behind *barbarus.* It also persists as an assumption behind much Plautine scholarship. At one point in a recent essay on the nature of Roman comedy, for example, Konrad Gaiser seems to think of Plautus' audience as no more attentive than a pack of mules.[4] Referring to the Plautine prologue he notes that Plautus had to get the attention of his restive audience through uncouth means; he had to try to get hold of the people and drag them along with him; he had to amuse them with coarse jokes, and facilitate their comprehension of the play's plot.[5] In response to this judgment, one might wonder why Plautus bothered to try, if it was that hard to make the New Comedy palatable. Once again, however, it should be noted that Gaiser's remarks reflect the perspective of the Greek theatergoer, who apparently would not require the same degree of assistance in order to enjoy and understand such comedies.

To illustrate what I mean, let us briefly look at the Plautine *palliata* through the eyes of some Samnite enthusiast of the Atellan farce. Now one arrives at a very different judgment of Plautus' intentions, and a very different judgment of his audience as well. Lovable old Dossenus has been turned into an uppity Greek slave. One's enjoyment of the stooge, Pappus, has been undermined by seeing him burdened with a spineless and spendthrift son. Overall, a robust, national art form has been mongrelized and enfeebled just to gratify the Roman audience's unwholesome preoccupation with the underside of Hellenic culture. Now perhaps this alternative view of Plautine comedy is not widely held among non-Samnites, yet it seems only slightly less legitimate than the more traditional view of Plautus' dramatic purposes. It is true that Plautus never claims to be adapting Oscan mimes, as he does seem to claim with respect to Greek comedies, but there may be other reasons to account for that difference. Citing a Greek model, for example, was clearly something of a convention in the Roman *palliata,* a convention to be followed, ignored, or parodied, like any other in Plautus. As a convention, its relevance to Plautus' literary goals is questionable. Furthermore, we must remember that many of Plautus'

[4] "Zur Eigenart der römischen Komödie," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* I. 2 (Berlin – New York 1972), p. 1035.

[5] "Plautus musste die Aufmerksamkeit seines unruhigen Publikums durch gröbere Mittel gewinnen. Er musste versuchen, die Leute zu packen und mitzureissen, musste sie mit derben Witzen unterhalten und ihnen das Verständnis des dramatischen Geschehens erleichtern" (*loc. cit.*).

plays do indeed ignore this convention, by failing to cite any model at all. Nevertheless, I am not seriously going to defend the Samnite's position on this issue. I am, however, going to challenge the Greek's. This I propose to do by treating the question of what Plautus did to his Greek models as essentially irrelevant. A more interesting and pertinent question seems to be: "What did the Greek models do to Plautus?"

At this point my own audience may be getting rather restive. "What," it may be asked, "does Plautus' relationship to his Greek models have to do with the title of this paper?" Actually, as I hope to demonstrate in what follows, the question of Plautus' response to contemporary Roman tragedy is closely involved with the question of how he used his Greek models; but it will take me a few minutes to show precisely how the two issues are interconnected. Our point of departure will be an examination of certain aspects of literary parody in Plautus. This, in turn, will bring us to a consideration of how the *palliata* acquired its own distinct literary identity. And from there we shall return to the issue which has been outlined in my introduction.

The nature and purposes of literary parody in Plautus form so large and complicated a subject that I cannot hope to deal comprehensively with it here. Fortunately, however, a comprehensive review is not required for my purposes, although a few general remarks would be in order before I turn to the more detailed consideration of certain specific issues.

Over the past century, scholars have devoted increasing attention to the nature and purposes of literary parody[6] in Plautus. Leo, in his *Plautinische Forschungen,*[7] had identified what he considered to be two general types of literary parody. One of these types was the parody of some situation familiar from tragedy or epic. A good example is the distraught messenger's speech, such as Pardalisca's *canticum* from the *Casina.*

621 Nulla sum, nulla sum, tota, tota occidi,
cor metu mortuomst, membra miserae tremunt,
nescio unde auxili, praesidi, perfugi
mi aut opum copiam comparem aut expetam:
625 tanta factu modo mira miris modis
intus vidi, novam atque integram audaciam. (*Cas.* 621 ff.)

Pardalisca has burst out of the house pretending that the delectable

[6]The interesting questions of self-parody and parody of strictly comedic conventions are omitted from consideration here.

[7]Above, note 1, pp. 119 ff.

Casina has gone mad and is chasing other members of the household with a sword in her hand and murder in her heart. Quite obviously the scene evokes a situation common in tragedy where a messenger recounts some mayhem which has taken place offstage. The mock-tragic tone of Pardalisca's song is realized through a number of stylistic features which are characteristic of contemporary Roman tragedy. As examples of such features the following can be mentioned: (1) the repetition of words and phrases for pathetic effect, e.g., *nulla sum, nulla sum, tota, tota occidi* (v. 621); (2) the abundant alliteration, e.g., *cor metu mortuomst, membra miserae tremunt* (v. 622, cf. 625); and (3) the striving for amplitude through weighty periphrases and grandiloquent juxtapositions of near synonyms, e.g., *opum copiam* (v. 624) in place of a simple *opes,* and *auxili, praesidi, perfugi* (v. 623, cf. 625).

The other type of literary parody which Leo attributed to Plautus differs from the first in that it involves the use of ostensibly tragedic style in contexts which are otherwise completely free of tragic associations. A good example comes from the *Pseudolus,* where Calidorus is greeted by the play's namesake.[8] Pseudolus announces that he will greet his man in the grand manner (*magnufice*), and thereupon modulates into the following passage:

io te, te, turanne, te, te ego, qui imperitas Pseudolo,
quaero quoi ter trina triplicia, tribu' modis tria gaudia,
705 artibus tribu' tris demeritas dem laetitias, de tribus
705a fraude partas per malitiam, per dolum et fallacias;
in libello hoc opsignato ad te attuli pauxillulo.
CALI. illic homost. CH. ut paratragoedat carnufex!

This passage is particularly interesting because of the comment upon it which is offered by Charinus in v. 707: *ut paratragoedat carnufex!* By putting this observation into the scene, Plautus unambiguously reveals an explicit consciousness of caricaturing tragedic style. The passage enables us, therefore, to identify at least some of the devices which the poet specifically associates with such style. Most obvious are the same features which we noticed in connection with Pardalisca's *canticum:* anadiplosis, pleonasm, alliteration and parechesis. Additionally, one might call attention to the paronomasia and polyptoton involving the numeral *tres* and related forms, the anaphora of *tribus* and *per,* the word *imperitas* in v. 703, which seems to be something of a gloss in place of the more customary *imperas,* and the grand sounding abstract nouns *malitiam* and *fallacias* in verse 705a. Yet, although all of this rhetorical finery undoubtedly does have its counterpart in contemporary Roman

[8] *Pseud.* 703 ff.

tragedy, we must beware of jumping to the unwarranted conclusion that such features are tragedic in any specific or exclusive sense. The uncertainty exists because many of these same features comprise a pervasive aspect of what has to be counted "normal" Plautine style too. Glosses, for example, are liberally scattered throughout Plautus, sometimes appearing in passages otherwise of the utmost plainness. Thus the appearance of one here is unlikely to be "parodic" in any obvious way. The same point could be made of the grand sounding abstract nouns,[9] the anaphora, the word play and almost all of the remaining features.[10] Certainly the anadiplosis, however, here amusingly reduced to a virtual stammer in verse 703, as well as the excruciating pleonasm of verses 704 ff., not to mention the spluttering alliteration which permeates the whole passage, are here being overworked to parodic effect. Perhaps not coincidentally, these were the very same markings which stood out in the *Casina* passage we looked at earlier. We might tentatively conclude, then, that the most salient characteristics of tragedic style *per se,* at least as satirized by Plautus in these two passages, would appear to be its noisiness and wordiness.

More than one scholar has seen an allusion in verse 703 of this same passage to the notorious Ennian hexameter: *O Tite tute Tati tibi tanta tyranne tulisti.*[11] Syntactically, however, the two passages are quite dissimilar, and their shared alliteration seems to be due to accident more than design. Whereas the Ennian alliteration depends upon an elaborate and artificial pattern of word choice and polyptoton, the effect in Plautus results simply and inescapably from the anadiplosis. No doubt the shared word *turanne* has provided the strongest inducement for connecting these two passages, but again coincidence may be the better explanation. The choice of word is well motivated in the context of an address by a *servus callidus* to his *erus adulescens,* particularly when the mode of address is styled to be *magnifice.* Furthermore the word echoes a type of metaphorical description which is perfectly common elsewhere in Plautus.[12] Taken together, these points argue against connecting the Plautine and Ennian lines, despite their superficial similarity. Nevertheless, our discussion of them has served to introduce an important issue in the study of Plautine parody, namely to what extent

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[9]G. Lodge, *Lexicon Plautinum,* 2 vols. (Leipzig 1924-32), s.vv.

[10]Except perhaps the anadiplosis which Plautus often parodies to good effect: e.g., *Miles* 415: SC. *Palaestrio, o Palaestrio!* PA. *o Sceledre, Sceledre, quid vis?;* cf. *Poen.* 1195-96. Both passages are cited by A. Thierfelder, "Plautus und römische Tragödie," *Hermes* 74 (1939), pp. 155-66.

[11]109 V.

[12]E.g. *Capt.* 825: *non ego nunc parasitus sum, sed regum rex regalior.*

Plautus parodies, if he does so at all, specific works and passages of contemporary tragedy and epic.

It is difficult to answer this question with any assurance, in view of the very fragmentary remains of tragedy and epic from this period of Roman literature. My own opinion is that many of the alleged examples of such parody in Plautus are mirages, much like the probably spurious connection between the two passages which were just discussed. Yet not all of the examples proposed by scholars in this regard can be so easily dismissed. One of the most convincing comes from the famous "Trojan" canticum of the *Bacchides,* in which the victorious slave, Chrysalus, compares his complete duping of the *senex* to the sack of Troy:[13]

925 Atridae duo fratres cluent fecisse facinus maxumum,
quom Priami patriam Pergamum divina moenitum manu
armis, equis, exercitu atque eximiis bellatoribus
milli cum numero navium decumo anno post subegerunt.
non pedibus termento fuit praeut ego erum expugnabo meum
930 sine classe sineque exercitu et tanto numero militum.
cepi, expugnavi amanti erili filio aurum ab suo patre.
nunc prius quam huc senex venit, lubet lamentari dum exeat.
o Troia, o patria, o Pergamum, o Priame periisti senex,
qui misere male mulcabere quadrigentis Philippis aureis.
935 nam ego has tabellas opsignatas, consignatas quas fero
non sunt tabellae, sed equos quem misere Achivi ligneum.

I will not discuss the, to me unconvincing, suggestion of Marmorale and others,[14] that this passage is an extensive travesty of a song from Naevius' *Trojan Horse,* but wish to concentrate instead on the often repeated judgment that verse 933 of Chrysalus' song, *o Troia, o patria, o Pergamum, o Priame periisti senex,* alludes to the opening line of the famous lament of Andromache in Ennius' *Andromacha: O pater o patria o Priami domus!*[15] It is not just the shared alliteration, or even the shared vocabulary which supports the connection — both features are simply too natural in this context to be of much weight. The parallel rhythm and word order are perhaps stronger evidence. But what seems the strongest evidence is the lack of motivation for such an apostrophe in this specific song. One could remove verses 932-34 of the song without causing the slightest disturbance to the flow of the surrounding context. Verse 932, in particular, shows up as a very lame transition to

[13] *Bacch.* 925 ff.

[14] *Naevius Poeta* (3rd ed., Florence 1953), p. 147; cf. E. H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin,* vol. 2 (London and Cambridge, Mass. 1967), pp. 116-17.

the apostrophe, since the satiric "lament" which it introduces is immediately given up in favor of a return to the comic elaboration of the Trojan metaphor. Thus there seems little reason for such an apostrophe, and little effect to it, unless it serves to evoke a memorable *tour de force* which was known to the audience from elsewhere.

On the assumption that Chrysalus' apostrophe does allude to the lament of Andromache, it is interesting that the nature of this "parody," to call it that, seems to invite no ridicule of its target. Such satiric effect could easily have been achieved by, for example, extending the apostrophe for another phrase or two. But Plautus has avoided such satire here and, I would argue, in all other similar contexts. What is the allusion's purpose then? Fraenkel has shown how the Plautine *servus callidus* typically compares his own exploits with the deeds of gods, heroes, and famous men from Greek myth and history. An example can be found in the guiding motif of the very canticum we are discussing; namely, Chrysalus' self-comparison with the Atreids.[16] The comic self-importance conveyed by such conceits is thoroughly in keeping with the larger-than-life character of the *servus.* It would follow that much the same purpose is served by evoking "high" literature. The fun arises from the presumption of the *servus.* It does not depend upon something inherently humorous in the style of the allusion itself, nor in its target. My point is simply that ostensibly parodic allusions of this type serve to complement and assist in the development of a comedic convention, rather than to form the focus of a joke. As such they are not truly parodic, at least not in the sense of embodying satire or caricature of their models.

Thus far we have reviewed three different kinds of literary parody in Plautus. There was the parodic evocation of a situation familiar from tragedy or epic; the caricature of certain stylistic flourishes typically found in tragedic language; and the parodic allusion to some specific work of contemporary high literature. Of these three phenomena, the first is quite common. One thinks of the additional examples provided by prophetic dreams in the *Miles* and the *Rudens,* the ravings of a maddened character in the *Menaechmi* and the *Mercator,* the threat of suicide in the *Cistellaria,* the eye-witness account of an epic battle in the *Amphitruo,* and other similar instances. Conversely, the frequency of parodic allusion to specific works of literature is much more difficult to assess, in view of the very fragmentary remains of tragedy and epic which have survived from this period. With regard to those very few

[15]92-99 V.

[16]On this canticum in particular see *Elementi Plautini,* pp. 62 ff.

examples which have been plausibly conjectured,[17] the following generalizations can be hazarded. The model is evoked, either by a close verbal echo or by name, in a context of surrounding magniloquence. The allusion is fleeting and clearly subsidiary to the larger effect of that context. And lastly, the purpose of the allusion is simply to augment the hyperbole of the idiom of self-characterization. In assessing the frequency of the remaining type of literary parody, the caricature of high style *per se,* there arises a problem to which we must now devote more particular attention.

The traditional view of the difference between the style of Plautus and that of contemporary tragedy and epic is that the former is a reflection of the *sermo cottidianus,* while the latter has its origin in the ceremonial language of old Roman religion and law. Certainly there is a basis in fact for this view, but so bald a formulation of it is oversimplified. Anaphora, pleonasm, exotic vocabulary, archaic morphology, mnemonic alliteration — such elements of style assuredly were derived originally from juridical and religious language, where they served an obvious functional purpose. Once they had defined the idiom of the earliest Roman literature, however, they were free to be extended or modified in whatever direction the development of literature chose to take them. Many students of Plautine language, such as Jean-Pierre Cèbe in his stimulating and helpful book just mentioned on caricature and parody in Roman art, have assumed that the ceremonial style is not natural to comedy, and therefore must be parodic of something external to comedy. Such a view would be more convincing, if all the instances of ceremonial style were limited to contexts of obviously, or even plausibly, parodic intent. But the facts are otherwise. Let us consider a passage like the following, for example, a stretch of *senarii* in which Saturio, the splendid parasite of the *Persa,* introduces himself to the audience.[18]

53 Veterem atque antiquom quaestum maiorum meum
servo atque optineo et magna cum cura colo.
55 nam numquam quisquam meorum maiorum fuit
quin parasitando paverint ventris suos:
pater, avos, proavos, abavos, atavos, tritavos
quasi mures semper edere alienum cibum,
neque edacitate eos quisquam poterat vincere,
60 neque is cognomentum erat duris Capitonibus.

Saturio's language incorporates most of the hallmarks of the ceremonial

[17] See J.-P. Cèbe, *La caricature et la parodie dans le monde romain* (Paris 1966), pp. 103 ff.

[18] *Persa* 53 ff.

style. There is the fulsomeness – *servo atque optineo et magna cum cura colo* (54); parechesis and alliteration – *nam numquam quisquam meorum maiorum* (55); glosses, including both elevated abstract nouns and archaisms – *edacitate* (59), *cognomentum* (60); and the list could be extended. Such language is clearly bombastic, but in what sense can it be parodic? When virtually every scene of almost every play contains examples of similar bombast, the sheer abundance of the phenomenon seems to preclude any intention of stylistic parody. This, then, is the problem: if the ceremonial style is a Plautine addition to the idiom of comedy, then what effect was sought – or achieved, whether sought or not – by working it to such excess?

Probably the most commonly accepted answer to this question is the one suggested by Fraenkel. In his discussion of the aesthetic differences which separate the Plautine *palliata* from its Greek New Comedy models, Fraenkel calls attention to fundamental differences in the cultural contexts of the two art forms. A simple fact like the different social status of the actors – citizens in the Greek setting, slaves and foreigners in the Roman – will undoubtedly have influenced the way in which these plays were approached by their respective audiences. Fraenkel argues that the form of Greek New Comedy was perfectly suited to the particular cultural interests which had brought about its development. Once transplanted onto Roman soil, however, a living and evolving organism became an artificial and arbitrary device for serving quite different aesthetic purposes.[19] The thesis of Fraenkel's book, of course, is that Plautus sensed these different purposes naturally, and that he transformed the style of Greek comedy to conform to them, while keeping the form of Greek comedy more or less intact. A primitive artistic taste, he argues, is not satisfied with a portrait of ordinary daily life.[20] In other words, the Romans had no use for the kind of "realism" for which Menander was so much admired. Fraenkel continues:

> Plauto e il suo pubblico pretendono dal dramma l'inconsueto: se gli originali non sono pronti ad offrirlo, provvede il rielaboratore a inserirvelo per forza. Grazie a tali interventi, in non pochi passi anche la commedia romana forní, almeno ai suoi spettatori, gli stessi elementi che per quel medesimo pubblico costituivano una delle maggiori attrattive della tragedia.[21]

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[19] *Elementi Plautini* (above, note 2), p. 367.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 370.

It is, then, to this alleged taste for the grand and the different that Fraenkel assigns Plautus' extensive use of the language of tragedy. The point seems to be that Roman audiences liked their tragedy and wanted their comedy to be stylistically similar to it. What are the implications of this view for the question of stylistic parody in Plautus? One seems to be that much or most of the ostensibly tragedic style in the plays is not parodic at all, being instead a kind of motif, like the leatherette cushion on a seat of molded plastic in a McDonald's restaurant. But a second implication might be that there was no distinct tragedic language which the Roman audience perceived as fundamentally different from the language of comedy. Such was not, I believe, the view of Fraenkel, but I hope to show that it deserves consideration none the less.

With these observations in mind, let us now set about answering the question which was articulated in the introduction to this paper: "What did the Greek models do to Plautus?" To answer this question will entail defending the following specific propositions.

(1) At the time when it came into being in the later third century, Roman literature was characterized by a relatively homogeneous style and range of subjects — namely those shared by epic and tragic poetry.

(2) The first 80 years or so of Roman literary development, down to the time of Terence in the mid-second century, witnessed the gradual emergence of the *palliata* as a distinct and independent genre with its own stylistic identity. An important corollary to this proposition is another one: that the origin and evolution of the Roman *palliata* can be viewed as essentially a process of increasing differentiation from the genre of tragedy.

(3) Plautine comedy represents a kind of mid-point, or perhaps critical turning point, in the evolution of the *palliata*.

(4) To view Plautine comedy in this way helps to explain its style more satisfactorily than the traditional view which assigns a separate identity to the *palliata* from the beginning. Moreover this evolutionary view of the *palliata* is consistent with other developments in Roman literature of the archaic period.

Let me now take up a defense and more detailed discussion of these propositions.

In referring to the essential homogeneity of early Latin literary style, I do not mean to suggest that tragedy and comedy were indistinguishable at some point in the Roman past. Instead I am proposing that each successive stage of the development of formal literature in the Greek manner at Rome — beginning first with Livius Andronicus'

retelling of the Homeric *Odyssey,* turning later to tragedy and *praetextae,* later still to *togatae* and *palliatae* — involved some measure of stylistic differentiation from its predecessors. In the case of the *palliata,* this differentiation reflected at least two external influences. One was the vulgarization of literary style in response to the popular idiom of improvisational farce. The other was an increasing accommodation to the elegant plainness of the style of Greek New Comedy. The case for this evolutionary view of the development of the *palliata* rests partly on a number of characteristics which the *palliata* shares with tragedy in the time of Plautus, but which it has given up by the time of Terence. One of these, as we have seen, is the apparently purposeless abundance of ostensibly tragedic language in Plautus. Another is the form itself of the *palliata,* which clearly imitates and, therefore, is probably derived from the form of tragedy. Fraenkel's well-known theory about the origin of the Plautine *cantica*[22] is a perfect illustration of what I mean. The problem of the *cantica,* it will be remembered, is that Hellenistic New Comedy has none — this despite the fact that such songs are perhaps the most distinctive and artistically polished elements in Plautine dramaturgy. Fraenkel demonstrated that *cantica* were also present in the earliest Roman tragedy. From this identity he deduced that Plautus had imported the convention of lyric song from tragedy into comedy. But another way of accounting for the identity would be that Plautus (or perhaps some predecessor like Naevius) imported the plots and cast of characters of Greek comedy into the preexisting form of Roman drama, which was perforce tragedy.

Another formal identity between the two genres was clarified in an important study of poetic language in early Latin literature by Fraenkel's pupil, Heinz Haffter.[23] Haffter demonstrated something very interesting about the statistical distribution of the more highly marked elements of tragedic style in Plautus. He found that archaisms, etymological figures, periphrases, abstract nouns, and other such elements tended to occur much more frequently in the *cantica,* the trochaic long-verse, and the expository opening lines of individual scenes. In other words, the distribution of tragedic language is primarily a function of the formal structure of the play, rather than of its content. This suggests that the bulk of such language is not an aesthetic innovation by Plautus, but is instead merely a reflection of the artistic form in which he composed. Haffter noted that this distribution more or less corresponds to the division between the underlying Greek model and the Plautine additions to it. He saw it as a confirmation of Fraenkel's

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 307 ff.

thesis that it was precisely in these formal additions to the Greek models that Plautus showed the greatest stylistic independence from the Greek models. But once again, a negative image of the same picture gives us Roman tragedy as the starting point; the innovation is an increasing approximation to the style and aesthetic of Greek comedy.

I have suggested that the Roman *palliata* ought not to be thought of as a genre which was born fully formed. Such an argument makes sense not only in view of the vast differences between Plautine and Terentian comedy, but even from the considerable variety of style and form which one encounters within the corpus of Plautus. Some plays, like the *Miles,* have few or no *cantica.* Some, like the *Captivi* and *Trinummus,* are so serious in tone as to appear almost un-Plautine. Some plays contain unique formal experiments, like the parabasis of the *Curculio* or the vaudevillian amorphousness of the *Stichus.* Others, like the *Mercator,* seem unusually faithful to the structure of Greek New Comedy. This variety seriously undermines the thesis of John Wright's interesting and influential study entitled *Dancing in Chains: the Stylistic Unity of the Comoedia Palliata.*[24] Wright argues that there was really only one conventional form of the genre, and that Terence's work was a generally unpopular break with tradition. But surely the evidence of the Plautine corpus reveals that the *palliata* was a series of comedic experiments. The variety and extent of these experiments disprove the existence of any canonical form to the genre, at least as Plautus practiced it.

Looking at the subject in this way gives us a different view of Plautus' method of composition. As opposed to adapting Greek comedy to Roman tastes, he appears to be participating in the creation of a new Roman comedy, one which combines the formal structure of Roman tragedy with much of the style and humor of the country farce. Added to this concoction are the romantic, at least to a Roman audience, and faraway settings and plots of Greek comedies.

Both Leo and Fraenkel called attention to the extraordinary similarities between Plautine and Aristophanic comedy. They felt these were due to a combination of coincidence and putative vestiges of Old Comedy style in the Greek models which Plautus was borrowing from. We might note, however, that the relationship which I am proposing between Plautine comedy and contemporary Roman tragedy is very similar to that which existed between Aristophanes and Attic tragedy of the fifth century. In both cases the comedic genre feeds on the form

[23] *Untersuchungen zur altlateinischen Dichtersprache* (Berlin 1934).

[24] American Academy in Rome Papers and Monographs XXV (Rome 1974).

and style of its counterpart in high literature. In neither case could that form of comedy have existed in the absence of the tragedic genre to which it responded. The larger than life quality of the Aristophanic hero and of the Plautine trickster, the lyric song, the criticism of literary style and all of the word-play which results from a stylistic self-consciousness born of such criticism, the burlesque stage effects — these and other elements shared by the two authors are motivated by their similar response to tragedy. Two other major components in Aristophanic comedy appear to have been Sicilian mime and some sort of formalized country pageantry. As has already been suggested, two other components in Plautine comedy were the Greek New Comedy and the Italian country farce.

The evolutionary direction taken by the *palliata* was an increasing fidelity to the style and form of Greek New Comedy. In Terence, the lyric meters of Roman tragedy have given way almost exclusively to the iambic and trochaic measures of his Hellenistic models. The characters of heroic dimension, like Ballio the pimp and Tranio the slave, have been largely replaced by the unspectacular, even if psychologically more interesting, roles of Menander. Hyperboles of language, both the bombastic grand style and the coarseness of the mime, have surrendered to the quiet refinement of an elegant *sermo cottidianus.*

In a well-known passage from the prologue to the *Andria*, Terence defends himself against the charge of spoiling his Greek models, by citing Plautus as an example of an acknowledged classic who was equally free in his use of Greek material. At first sight it seems surprising that an author whose style is so fundamentally different from that of Plautus can claim to be doing the same thing as Plautus did. Yet from the point of view proposed in this paper, they were indeed both doing the same thing — both were freely borrowing from Greek comedy whatever they found of use, and ignoring the rest. For this reason, incidentally, Fraenkel is not convincing when he argues that Plautus was placed under certain constraints by his Greek models — for example in that he was forced to obey a convention of dramatic unity.[25] The *Stichus* and *Miles* by themselves suffice to show that Plautus felt no such constraint. But as the *palliata* became more and more faithful to, and therefore dependent upon, Hellenistic New Comedy, such conventions no doubt did become more compulsory.

The development of the *palliata* to a canonical and Hellenic form reflects a similar development in the other genres of Roman literature of the second century. Ennius' Greek-style epic, for example, with its

[25] *Op. cit.* (above, note 2), p. 373.

Alexandrian aesthetic orientation and rejection of the native bardic tradition, and, most importantly, with its immense literary self-consciousness, is a very close parallel to the formalization of the *palliata* under Terence. Similarly in tragedy, although the evidence is very meager, it appears that Accius in the later second century followed still further in the direction which had been set by Pacuvius toward greater fidelity to contemporary Greek drama.[26] It is noteworthy that his *Didascalica,* as well as the *Satires* of Lucilius, reveal an academic interest in literature which is akin to the discussion of literary issues found in Terence. My point is that the increasing Hellenization of the *palliata* reflects both an increasing Hellenization of Roman art generally, and a corresponding formalization of what constituted viable literature.

An answer has now been proposed to the question which was put in the introduction to this paper. A rendering into Latin of Hellenistic New Comedy ought not to be thought the central goal of Plautus' comedic interests. Certainly the Greek comedy was a critically important component in the heterogeneous form of comedy which Plautus was instrumental in developing. But it was only that — a component. A play like the *Amphitruo,* of course, does not even have a New Comedy model. Yet Plautus' comedic interests did not follow in the direction to which that particular experiment pointed. Instead it led to the formalization of the *palliata* as we know it under Terence.

Let me conclude by observing that the thesis which I have proposed in this paper has a particular application to the theme of this conference. In a well-known passage of the *Attic Nights* (II. 23), Gellius compares several passages of Caecilius' *Plocium* with the Menandrian *loci* on which they are ostensibly modeled. To Gellius' mind, Caecilius shows up very badly in this comparison. Not only, we are told, is no attempt made to render whole passages of Menandrian elegance, but Caecilius even stoops so low as to replace such passages with a lot of vulgar humor taken from the mime. He sacrifices the purity and realism of Menander's language (*sinceritatem veritatemque verborum*) to the bloated language of tragedy (*verba tragici tumoris*). Gellius concludes by offering the judgment: *non puto Caecilium sequi debuisse quod assequi nequiret.*[27]

Gellius' judgment of Caecilius is not unlike the view which many critics have formed of Plautus. It is a view which may already have been emerging in the time of Terence, although it was certainly furthered by the stylistic prescriptions of the later Republic, when *puritas* was

[26]F. Leo, *Geschichte der r. Literatur* (above, note 1), pp. 397 ff.

[27]II. 23. 22.

the nearly universal watchword of all who aspired to good Latinity. Cicero, for example, disparages the use of tragic style in comedy, and of comic style in tragedy.[28] The same sentiment is echoed by Horace (*AP* 89) and Quintilian (X. 2. 22). The proper avoidance of the Scylla and Charybdis of tragedic bloating and mimic buffoonery is a quality which Euanthius[29] much admired in Terence, while at the same time deploring its absence in Plautus and other early comedians. But perhaps this whole tradition of anti-Plautine criticism in later Roman literature is founded on a misunderstanding of what Plautus was attempting to do. If we could ask Plautus directly about the judgment of posterity, he might reply in the words which he gave to more than one of his glorious *servi: bene ludificatumst,* which perhaps we may paraphrase as, "They missed the point entirely!"

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[28] *De opt. gen. or.* 1.

[29] The obscure author of the essay on comedy which accompanies Donatus' commentary to Terence. The argument is found at III. 5 (p. 20 W).